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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004299

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: PRESS BEGINS TO QUESTION TURKISH MILITARY
ACTIVITIES IN IRAQ

REF: A. ANKARA 4278

[1](#)B. ANKARA 4240

(U) Classified by DCM Robert S. Deutsch. Reason:1.5(b)(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Turkish press' sensationalist reaction to July 4 U.S. arrest (and subsequent release) of Turkish special forces soldiers in Iraq shifted somewhat July 9. Even mainstream secularist journalists have begun to question what the Turkish military is or may have been doing in Iraq. Responding to harsh criticism of the AK Government for its supposed "submissive" stance toward the U.S. (ref A), F.M. Gul sounded a slightly tougher note; privately, AK officials assert to us that the incident is clarifying the need to rein in the TGS/military and bring it under civilian control. Establishment standard-bearer "Cumhuriyet," well-connected to senior military leadership, highlights what it calls a growing "crisis" between the relatively conciliatory AK and the TGS. Meanwhile, press conspiracy spinners continue to allege USG ties to the terrorist PKK/KADEK. Papers also note that the "Armenian genocide" issue is likely to further aggravate U.S.-Turkey relations. End summary.

Gen. Jones' Visit

[1](#)2. (U) The press characterized the July 8 visit of SACEUR/CINCUSEUR General Jones as an effort to "mollify" the Turks. The press also reported that the contentious issue of representation on the joint fact-finding commission (TGS rejected the U.S.'s initial candidate) had been resolved. All papers report that the commission will begin its work in Ankara July 9. The Ambassador's comments to the Anatolian Press Service reinforcing the U.S. commitment to a quick, fair, and transparent inquiry and describing the Jones visit as a positive step received wide and accurate coverage.

Establishment Press Suspicions About the Turkish Military

[1](#)3. (U) Leading columnists are beginning to question the nature of Turkish Special Forces' (TSF) activities in Iraq and their role in the current situation. "Hurriyet" editor-in-chief Ertugrul Ozkok, who had previously condemned the U.S. action in the strongest terms, today acknowledged that the Turks have some explaining to do. Ozkok questioned why explosive material was discovered in the Special Forces office and why members of the unit generally wore civilian clothes. The pro-West liberal Cuneyt Ulsever, another widely-followed "Hurriyet" columnist, raised similar questions and cast doubt on whether the AK Government was aware of what the TSF were doing. Muharrem Sarikaya, center-left "Sabah" Ankara bureau chief and a staunch supporter of the military, also raised the alleged presence of explosives in the local TSF office, and asserted that the "mystery" behind the crisis will now be solved in Ankara.

[1](#)4. (U) Secularist establishment standard-bearer "Cumhuriyet" ran a front-page story on "the Gul crisis," noting the divergence of statements by TGS Chief General Ozkok, who, the paper points out, said he does not believe the action was a "local event" (ref B), and F.M. Gul, who has repeatedly asserted that Washington had no prior knowledge of the action. Center-left "Milliyet" achieved the same purpose of

highlighting the different approaches of the TGS and AK Government by putting an angry threat of revenge from the military and the government's cool-handed approach on facing center-fold pages.

15. (U) Most papers carried FM Gul's subsequent comments on the floor of Parliament, offered in response to a query from the opposition pro-Establishment CHP, which asserted that AK Government had hurt "Turkish national honor." Gul replied that "it is ridiculous to think that the Turkish Armed Forces are involved in terrorist activity." He added that "it is the United States, not Turkey, that has lost" from this incident. Separately, papers quoted P.M. Erdogan as saying simply that the incident was "unfortunate."

16. (C) In private meetings with us, AK officials continue to seek USG moral support and underscore the need to improve bilateral ties. AK Diyarbakir M.P. Cavit Torun approached us July 9 asking what "we" -- AK and the USG -- "could do about the Turkish military." Separately, AK M.P. Irfan Gunduz, a personal friend of Gul and like him a representative of Kayseri (Gul's geographic political base), asserted to us that, in fact, the Turkish military would suffer in the eyes of the public for what it had done in Iraq. Moreover, Gunduz added, the latest incidents make it even more imperative that AK pursue its reform agenda and end the military's unchecked dominance over the Turkish State by bringing it under real civilian control.

No U.S. Apology, Plenty of Conspiracy Theories

17. (U) Both "Hurriyet" and "Radikal" carried articles suggesting that the United States is neither backing off its claims that the operation was justified nor preparing to apologize. "Hurriyet" cited U.S. officials in Washington who state that Turkey has not been a reliable NATO partner. Inaccurately, the paper asserts the officials claim that the Turks refused to grant emergency landing permission to a U.S. plane struck by enemy fire. Islam-oriented "Yeni Safak" latched on to the conspiracy theory that the U.S. action was intended to protect the PKK from Turkish Special Forces and then use the PKK against the Iranian regime. Conspiratorial thinking was also evident in reports of an assassination attempt yesterday against the Governor of the southeastern province of Tunceli. "Hurriyet" noted on its front page that "while the U.S. claims that Turks plotted to kill a Kurdish governor, the PKK/KADEK carried out an attack against the governor of Tunceli." "Cumhuriyet" juxtaposed the story of the failed assassination with a claim that the source of the current controversy in Iraq stems from the U.S. failure to deal effectively with the PKK threat.

Detentions over, "Genocide" Coming...

18. (U) All papers reported that the current crisis is likely to deepen this week with the likely passage of an Armenian genocide resolution by the U.S. Senate. As a headline in "Milliyet" put it, "Detentions are Over, but Genocide is Coming."
PEARSON